

THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE THEOSOPHICAL HEADQUARTERS AT ADYAR, MADRAS

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President

A communication from a General Secretary has come to me officially with a question from a Lodge asserting that there appears to be "a very great and apparently unjustifiable expenditure involved in the operations of Headquarters". In other words the questions asked are: "Why has the Theosophical Society an annual deficit? Why does it not live within its income?" The answer in brief is simple: "Because the Society's income does not cover its expenditure."

The full answer to both these questions from the Lodge requires a long statement. From the beginning of the Society's work, the Society has never met its expenses from the annual dues of the members. No

salary is paid to any of its principal officers and so Colonel H. S. Olcott and Madame H. P. Blavatsky started *The Theosophist* hoping it might provide a small income. H.P.B. earned some money by writing articles for Russian papers. Both poured what money they earned into the Society and to cover the general expenses of the then Headquarters in Bombay, helped by a few donations. When the Headquarters were transferred to Adyar, an estate then of 28 acres was purchased with a central building and four small cottages. The money was raised by loans from members and slowly paid off. Part of the estate had a coco-nut grove and was let out to toddy-makers to earn some income—toddy being a mild intoxicating drink due to the fermentation of the juice of coco-nut palm buds. After a few years, when protests were made that the Society was encouraging drink, Col. Olcott had to ask members to cover by donations the deficit caused by not leasing the trees, and this was slowly done. A smaller income was then made by selling the coco-nuts.

Soon after coming to Adyar, a small book business was started in connection with *The Theosophist* office. Members from all parts of the world usually sent donations to help to meet the expenses of travel of the two Founders. There were, however, times when Headquarters' staff, consisting in 1886 of Col. Olcott, C. W. Leadbeater, A. J. Cooper-Oakley and

a few Indian workers, lived on a very meagre allowance amounting to about six pence per day. The *Theosophist* was published in the city of Madras seven miles away, and a carriage and horses were kept, as many supplies had to be obtained from the nearest shops five miles away. There were not even trams in those days. When the horses died one after another, for several months Mr. Leadbeater, as acting editor of *The Theosophist* had to walk the seven miles to Madras with proofs, etc. During all this period Headquarters was only a place for just the few staff workers necessary for the Society.

A great transformation took place when Dr. Besant became President in 1907. Her plan was to make the Society's Headquarters (which already possessed the Adyar Library, established in 1886) a centre to which students, and especially those who meant later to be workers "in the field", might come and reside for one or two years in order to study and take part in such meetings as were then being held. Members came from all over the world coinciding with the great expansion of the Society's estate from 28 acres to 266 acres = 108 hectares. Several buildings with gardens contiguous to the original Headquarters were purchased by Dr. Besant from the donations of the members and from her own gifts. These were transformed into living quarters for the students who came. Owing to the lack of accommodation for

them, a large concrete building in three stories called Leadbeater Chambers, consisting of thirty flats (sitting-room, bedroom and bathroom) was erected, the gift of an English member, the first building of the kind of the size in India. The contractor used sea sand with salt in it, instead of pure sand, to mix with the cement, since which time Leadbeater Chambers has required constant repairs, as the concrete continually breaks away. An Indian member erected two buildings for residential quarters for Indian members, on a simpler basis of one room each, to meet the smaller incomes of Indian students. Both Leadbeater Chambers and the Indian residential quarters have restaurants for their residents.

Later, the large building of the Theosophical Publishing House, the upper part of which is now the offices of the Treasurer and the Recording Secretary, was the gift of the same English member. As the residential population of workers and students increased, it was necessary to have a special laundry of our own, since laundry given out to the contracting washermen was apt to be lent out and might be contaminated in the unsanitary conditions of their homes. A dairy also was started to provide clean milk. This institution has always caused us a certain amount of loss as we have not sold off the old cows to the butchers, but kept them on as pensioners. A few months ago owing to great difficulties of getting fodder through

famine and other conditions, and due to the fact that there is now a City Co-operative Association in Madras which has guaranteed to give us good milk, the dairy has been closed down. It has been necessary to have a Dispensary with a resident medical officer and a compounder.

The buildings and all unoccupied spaces are at the moment being taxed for the first time by the Corporation of Madras which has expanded its limits and included Adyar. The taxes amount to about Rupees 11,000 (£832 sterling, \$3,353). Some of the buildings, as the main Headquarters Building, are over one hundred years old, and although structurally they are on the whole sound, constant repairs are necessary. We have to be continuously on our guard against white ants. When Dr. Besant became President, the only lighting was with kerosene lamps. She instituted an electrical installation, producing the current from charcoal. This necessitated that during the night, when the Power House closed down, there should be a battery to supply light. This meant that the Society had to budget for a new battery about every eight years. Residents are charged for light. From the year 1935, a company in Madras City has supplied electricity in bulk at 6,000 volts, so that our electrical Power House is now a transformer station, but owing to the many buildings it is necessary to keep a minimum staff of electricians. Any moment

in monsoon time with heavy wind, with the damage to the wires from falling branches and inside buildings due to excessive damp (we have just had $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches = 19 cm. of rain in 20 hours), the current is cut off suddenly needing investigation from the day or night Power House staff. A few months ago part of the wiring was made into underground cables at a considerable expense. In addition, there are employed a certain number of carpenters, fitters and masons, since continual repairs are necessary to the 66 buildings, and culverts, roads, etc., in this estate of 266 acres.

Strict accounts are kept of all expenditure. Every resident pays rent for the room or rooms which he occupies and for everything else for which the Treasury can send him a bill, including the use of water.

In past years nearly all the housing accommodation used to be filled, and during such periods rents have helped to diminish the deficit. But during many years past, particularly during the war years, several of the buildings have been mostly empty. Members from many parts of the world desire once more to come to Adyar, but travel difficulties and particularly restrictions of entry for non-British subjects into India are so great, that at the moment we have not the large population of students and workers that used to characterize the Theosophical Headquarters during the years 1910 to 1926.

Every three months the Executive Committee has presented to it the accounts of the various departments, and what each has spent is compared with what was allocated to it in the budget sanctioned by the General Council of the Society at its annual meeting. Every item of expenditure, beyond a small amount permitted to the discretion of the head of a department, has now to be sanctioned first by the Treasurer and after by the President.

The beautiful estate of the Society is the finest park in all South India and visitors come daily to see both the Great Hall of the Society and its Adyar Library, the religious Shrines, and especially its famous Banyan Tree. It has been found necessary during the last few years, because of the influx of visitors, to have a department of Watch and Ward, which has twenty-four men in uniform for policing by day and by night. Contiguous to one side of the Headquarters estate is a village, some of the inhabitants of which have an idea that the Society is rich, and that during the night they can "help" themselves to coco-nuts, mangoes and any other thing that they can carry away. Owing to the large boundary of the estate, it is not possible to have an adequately high wall. Wherever we put up a boundary wall with sharp glass on top, the glass is promptly broken away and thieves hop over and "help" themselves to whatever they can from

an organization which proclaims "Universal Brotherhood"! When we put up barbed wire, it is easy for these gentry to find pliers to cut the wire. There is, therefore, the need for policing the estate at night also.

Every two years the annual Convention of the Society is held at Adyar Headquarters and in alternate years it is held at the Headquarters of the Indian Section in Benares. The Indian Section of the Society is distinct from the Adyar Headquarters and Benares is three and a half days' train journey from Adyar. It is situated in a property of about ten acres with buildings of its own with a magnificent hall, offices and staff quarters, etc. Conventions at Adyar vary in the number of the attendance of members, the last one in 1945 being 1,210. The Convention of the Jubilee of the Society in 1925 brought 2,000 who were all housed in the Headquarters estate. This meant the special construction of large numbers of palm leaf thatched huts.

Until April of this year, the Society was outside the limits of the Corporation of Madras and so water had to be obtained from wells in the estate. Now a large overhead tank has been erected which is supplied by two pumps from a large well, and water is supplied by pipes to most of the buildings.

Several members of the Society have been permitted to build small houses on the condition that

after the death of the builder and his wife the building becomes the property of the Society. Each is responsible for its maintenance.

Each Easter there is a meeting of the Federations of the Lodges in South India, and as members come to reside for three or four days, accommodation has to be kept ready for them. Similarly, all the time some accommodation has to be kept ready for visiting members in both the Eastern and Western residential sections, with a minimum staff of servants.

The income of the Society is obtained from :

1. The annual dues of the members, which amount barely to one sixth of working expenses. As mentioned above, the four principal officers of the Society are not given any salary ; at the moment four departmental heads give their services free. But there is necessarily a supervising and clerical staff in all departments who receive salaries. A few workers are on a "subsistence allowance," some from funds donated by members for such a purpose.
2. Rents and interest from investments.
3. Donations.

The Society owns a printing press, which was established in 1908 by Dr. Besant—the Vasanta Press—and which by her will she donated to the Society. It used to employ 130 men but employs now

only 60. Compositors whom we badly need are scarce. All printing paper is still rationed. The Society owns also the Theosophical Publishing House established by Col. Olcott, but by his will the management of the Publishing House and *The Theosophist* is under the sole direction of the President.

It has been suggested that we should charge an admission fee to visitors. The sum obtained would be little. We do not want to keep out visitors who desire to see our Headquarters, and want to get some idea of what the Society stands for. We want them to see our Great Hall, with its figures of Buddha and Christ, of Shri Krishna and Zoroaster, and an Arabic inscription praising the Koran (for no image of the Prophet Muhammad may be made), and the symbols of Jainism, Judaism, Bahaism, Freemasonry, Sikhism, Taoism, Confucianism and Shinto among the living religions, and symbols of the past religions of Rome, Greece, Egypt, Mexico, Babylonia and Assyria. In large letters above stands out the motto of the Society:

“ THERE IS NO RELIGION HIGHER THAN TRUTH ”.

In the Headquarters estate are small temples or shrines of Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Muhammadanism, and the foundation platform of a Jewish Synagogue. These have been

erected by members of the various faiths, not by the funds of the Society. All these statues and temples within one estate explain clearer than books that Theosophy is *not a new religion*, but the brother of all religious endeavour in every field.

There is also the splendid Adyar Library, which is a public library, and no fee can be charged to visitors who come to see it. Furthermore, since Adyar is already known to the Indian public as a centre both of International and Hindu culture, it is unpractical to charge admission fees, which in the end will add little to our income.

Since April of this year, Headquarters have been brought within the Corporation limits. Earlier when it was part of the District of Chingleput, and being incorporated under the law as a Society on a religious and philanthropic basis, no house tax was paid; but the Corporation of Madras has imposed a house and land tax on us which we are trying to get reduced, especially as the Corporation is not likely for several years to supply us with light or water or sanitation, which we provide for ourselves.

A very heavy addition to the Society's expenditure has been made obligatory by the rise in the cost of living, three to four times for certain essential commodities, though their prices are controlled. All salaries and wages have had to be increased, after

many consultations of the Executive Committee, and these increases *have not yet been completed*. The Government is about to issue new scales and I have assured the workers in our various departments, gardeners, messengers, etc., that our scale for their pay will not be less than that of the Government, and furthermore that payment will be as from the 1st October. The number of workers who receive salaries in the fifteen departments is 329. The Executive Committee has considered in what way the staff can be decreased, but we find that this is the irreducible minimum in order to keep the Headquarters Estate and its many departments functioning properly.

The General Council of the Society allocates each year £ 500 sterling for the President's travelling expenses, a sum which is inadequate when travel out of India is necessary. But Sections send when they can donations to this fund. The Society out of its funds has to allow for the maintenance of some overseas members at Headquarters who are still stranded as the result of the war and whose income has ceased. Also allocations are made from the Faithful Service Fund to a small number of old workers who have given long years of service to the Society and now have little means to fall back upon.

The Executive Committee has under the Constitution to meet four times a year, but since I became

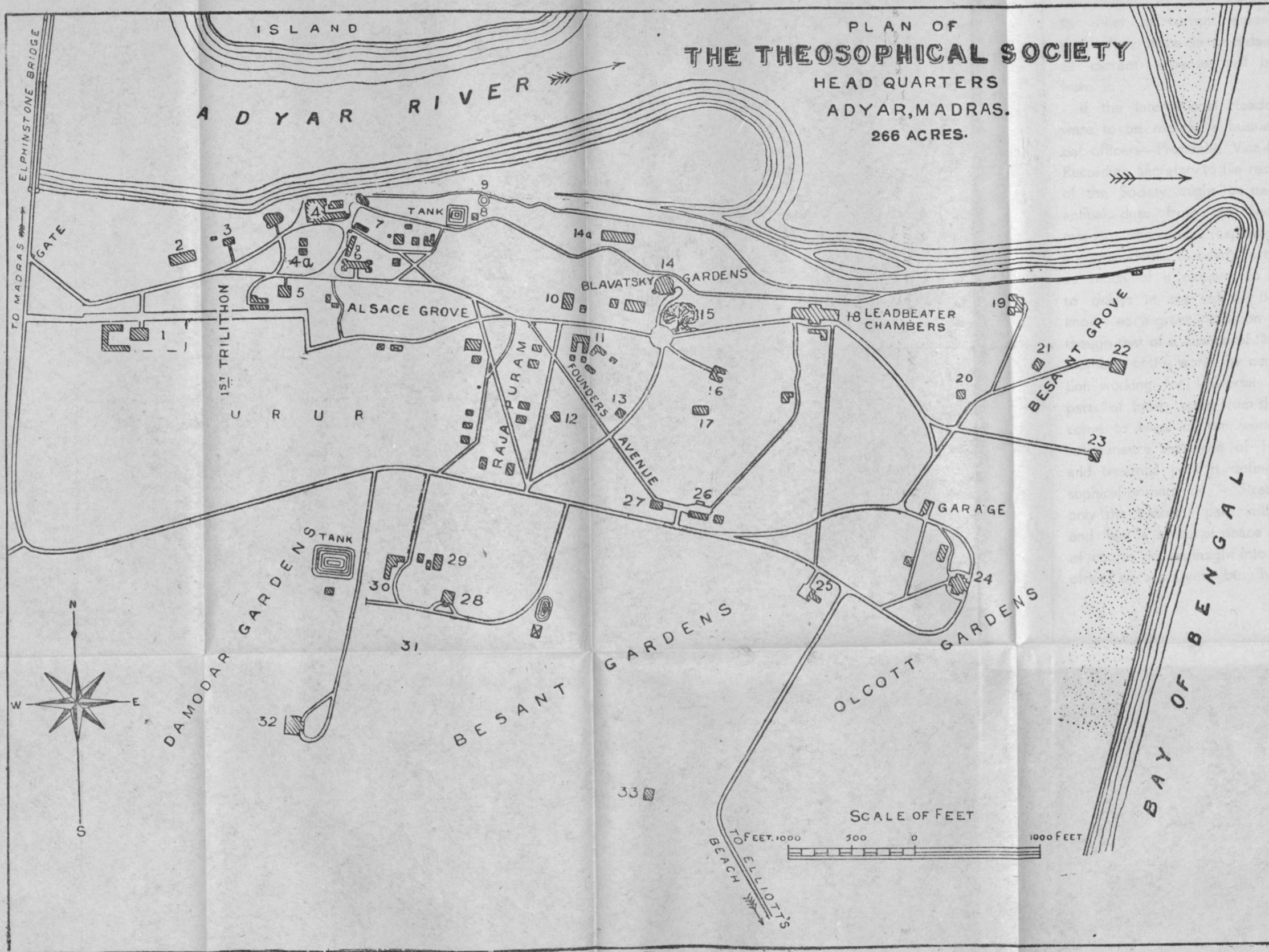
President it has been meeting two or three times a month, as the problems of the Theosophical Estate are very many and require constant consideration. Attempts are being made continually to consider in what way expenses can be cut down, but seeing the number of buildings we have which need maintenance whether occupied or not, and seeing the need to maintain the estate as it is as a beautiful park, the Headquarters of a great International Society, expenses so far as we can see cannot be cut down. We are striving on the other hand to the utmost not to increase expenses, although with the steady rise of the cost of materials and of wages, the problem is very difficult.

So far as I know, from the beginning the Society has always worked with a yearly deficit, which in part has been covered by donations of members. Now and then a generous member has put us in his or her will for a legacy and this eases the situation considerably. The Society is trying hard to make an Endowment Fund which shall not be drawn upon for current expenses. It needs to be ten times what it is now. But during the last months the Government has converted certain loans in which we had investments and reduced their interest from $3\frac{1}{2}\%$ to 3% . For future loans, the Government of India has decided that the interest shall be still further reduced to $2\frac{1}{4}\%$. Legacies and donations, not specially

ear-marked for the Endowment Fund, are used to meet all current expenses. It is our hope that when there is an adequate Endowment Fund all current expenses will be covered by interest from it.

If the International Headquarters of the Society were to be merely a business office with the principal officers—President, Vice-President, Treasurer and Recording Secretary to file records etc.—the expenses of the Society might be partly covered by the 10% annual dues from the Sections, although at the moment the postal expenses are very heavy for correspondence to nearly forty countries of the world, so much of it needing to be sent by air, owing to delays in sea mails. But the Society is now known as a great Institution and the word “Adyar”, though that of a district of Madras, signifies to all the members of the world the centre of a great Organization working for Universal Brotherhood. From all parts of India, apart from the city of Madras, visitors come to know of the work of the Society, and the maintenance therefore of Headquarters as a great and beautiful park is definitely one part of “Theosophical propaganda.” Strangers who visit Adyar see only the beautiful park with buildings dotted about, and feel a sense of peace and repose; they do not of course get an insight into the reality, that in all the offices we are a very busy hive of strenuous workers,

PLAN OF
THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY
 HEAD QUARTERS
 ADYAR, MADRAS.
 266 ACRES.



1. Vasanta Press
2. Site for new Building
3. Arundale House
4. Headquarters Building & Adyar Library
- 4a. Small Open Air Theatre
5. Dispensary, Baby Welcome and Maternity Centre
6. Theosophical Publishing House
7. Vasanta Puram Houses
8. Buddhist Shrine
9. Olcott Memorial
10. Bhojanasala
11. Indian Quadrangle
12. Hindu Temple
13. Zoroastrian Temple
14. Blavatsky Gardens
- 14a. Vani Vihar
15. Banyan Tree
16. Upasika Cottage
17. Christian Church
18. Leadbeater Chambers
19. Sevashrama
20. Site of Jewish Synagogue
21. Muslim Mosque
22. Parsi Quarters
23. Shantikunja
24. Olcott Gardens
25. Masonic Temple (not a part of Hdqrs. Estate)
26. Power House Workshops
27. Power House
28. Besant Gardens
29. Laundry
30. Dairy Buildings
31. Fruit and Vegetable Farm
32. Damodar Gardens
33. Cremation Ground
- Young Theosophists' Federation Cottage
- Garden of Remembrance

filled with an idealism which embraces the whole world.

Foundation Day

Adyar, November 17, 1946.

THE MAP OF THE ESTATE

The Headquarters Estate consists of 266 acres=108 hectares. Since the map was drawn in 1925 for *The Golden Book of the Theosophical Society* three small buildings have been added, one of them the cottage built by the World Federation of Young Theosophists.